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## THE PERMANENT SIGNIFICANCE OF MIRACLE FOR RELIGION

THE DUDLEIAN LECTURE FOR 1915 AT HARVARD  
UNIVERSITY

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A few days ago, meeting one of my scientific friends, I happened to mention the fact that I was going to Harvard to deliver the Duddleian Lecture, and that I had chosen as my subject "The Permanent Significance of Miracle for Religion." "It is a good subject," he said, "but you have left out the most important word. It ought to read 'The Lack of Permanent Significance of Miracle for Religion.'"

The remark reflects a mood which was more common twenty-five years ago than today. It was the age of triumphant science. On all sides men had banded themselves together to subdue the exceptional and the unforeseen, and to organize the territory which had hitherto been abandoned to chance or unreason under the all-embracing generalizations of the schools. Law was a word to conjure with. It not only commanded the reason; it fired the emotion. Men stood under the spell and glamour of the great magician whose wonder-working wand had unlocked so many doors. In view of the achievements of the past no obstacle seemed adamant, no secret impenetrable.

To men of this temper miracle had little interest. It was a synonym for all that was superstitious and out of date. The man who attempted to defend miracle stamped himself at once as an advocate of outworn

dogma—a Canute committed to the hopeless task of bidding the tide stand still. It was not so much that his hearers did not believe in miracles, though that was true of large circles of intelligent persons, as that they were no longer interested in them. They looked upon them as belonging to a past generation, without significance for men whose faces, like their own, were turned toward the future.

A change has come over the spirit of our dream. The confidence, so much in evidence among the scientists of the last generation, is less noticeable today. We are still bent on our task of conquest, but we realize better than we did how vast is the territory to be subdued. We are more modest than we were; readier to confess that the exceptional dies hard, and that there are elements which enter into the explanation of even the simplest things of which we are not yet—of which indeed we may perhaps never become—masters. And with this insight our mood has changed. The phenomena that explain the miracle-faith have reasserted their claim upon our attention. Our men of science no longer think it beneath their dignity to tell or to listen to ghost stories, and the records of visions, voices, prophecies, mediums, appearances from the dead, fill ponderous tomes over which professors, philosophers, and statesmen burn the midnight oil.

Nor is it merely that we have grown more catholic in our attitude toward the facts to be studied. A change is apparent in the philosophy from which we approach them. We are not so sure as we were that law is a term big enough to include the final fact about the universe. We have a shrewd suspicion that we have been carrying our simplification too far. Pluralism—but yesterday a hopelessly discredited—one might almost say, a pre-historic philosophy—now numbers the most respectable among its adherents. Professor William James has a

good word to speak for chance. He sees no ground for believing that contingency will ever be banished from the universe, and when pressed with the charge that this is to throw up the sponge and admit that after all miracles do happen he cannot, nor indeed does he greatly desire to, deny it.<sup>1</sup> In choice we ourselves initiate new lines of development, alter existing situations, determine the future according to our will. Why then should we deny a like power to God?

This change of mood finds systematic expression in Bergson. He is the philosopher of the unexpected; his fundamental dogma, the fact that the future cannot be predicted from the past. This is a world in which new things are coming to pass. Evolution is the law of life; but evolution is essentially creative. It is the forward push of energies as yet unrealized into a future that is unforeseen. Far from science having the right to speak the last word about the constitution of the universe, it is only our abstraction from a far more immediate and indescribable experience. It is through intuition, not reason, that we come closest to the nature of things, and for intuition, the novel and the inexplicable is the most frequent and familiar of experiences.

The effects of this changed attitude are reflected in contemporary theology. Whereas in the past the proof of miracle was the great task of apologetic, and to its accomplishment all the energies of theological science were marshalled, today it is passed over lightly as relatively unimportant. But this does not mean that the conception of miracle has been abandoned. On the contrary, it has been extended to cover phases of experience not included in the older discussions. Bushnell's thesis that miracle is a permanent constituent of the universe is widely accepted. To Ritschl miracle

<sup>1</sup> *The Will to Believe*, p. 182, cf. p. 175.

is a recurring experience. "Every one," he tells us, "will meet the miraculous in his own experience, and, in view of this, it is entirely unnecessary to stumble at the miracles which others have experienced" (*Instruction*, I, 17, note 3).

Such being the situation, I have been led to wonder whether the time were not ripe for a fresh discussion of the whole question of miracle. A generation ago men were arguing that miracles were impossible. Today we are told that all life is miraculous. Is it not worth while to ask ourselves how we can account for so radical a divergence of opinion? May there not be some fresh viewpoint from which to approach the problem, which will shed light on what would otherwise be an insoluble riddle?

Such, at least, is the question which I propose for our consideration. My theme is the permanent significance of miracle for religion. We shall ask ourselves first how men have come to believe in miracle at all; secondly, what issue is at stake in the belief; thirdly, what place it is likely to hold in the religion of the future.

Observe the form of the question. It is not metaphysical, but psychological. We shall not ask whether miracles happen, but why men believe that they happen, and what consequences for good or for evil follow from this belief. I do not mean that the former question is unimportant. On the contrary, I believe that it is highly important, but only that it is not first in order. We theorize because we have first experienced, and it is this preliminary inquiry as to the experience which accounts for the miracle-belief—an inquiry which, as I shall hope to show before I am through, is not without its bearing on the larger question—to which I invite you today.

## I

At the outset a definition is in order. By miracle, for the purpose of the present discussion, we shall understand an exceptional event, or quality in an event, in nature or in human life, the significance of which religious faith finds in the self-revealing activity of Deity. It is a strange fact with a divine meaning—a luminous surprise.

This definition may be criticised from two different points of view. It may be criticised either as too narrow or as too broad. The anthropologist will criticise it as too narrow. He will object to the restriction of the term, miracle, to acts which have a religious meaning. By miracle, as he understands it, is meant any act of a spirit, whether good or bad, meaning or unmeaning. It is a part of the primitive world-view which peoples the universe with a host of wonder-working spirits and attributes to their activity whatever it cannot understand. Of this wider field of the miraculous, miracle in the religious sense is only one among many examples.

The metaphysician, on the other hand, will find fault with our definition because it is too broad. A miracle, as he understands it, is an event inexplicable by natural law. It is not coextensive with the religious experience, but a name we give to a certain part of it, or, better still, to an explanation which theologians have given to a certain part of it. Miracle, in the metaphysical sense of the term, is an event which transcends reason, something which science is unable to bring under law.

We shall have occasion in the course of our discussion to refer to both these conceptions and to show their relation to the special subject of our study. But our present interest is a different one. We wish to understand the significance of miracle for religion, and it is fitting therefore that we should emphasize in our definition the

characteristics which bring this significance to expression. These characteristics are two: In the first place, a sense of surprise—the believer is conscious of the presence of a reality which defies rational explanation. In the second place, a sense of meaning—he discovers in this reality some reference of practical significance for his life. This combination of awe and enlightenment is common to the earliest and the latest believer in miracle, and, in spite of all intellectual differences, makes them kindred spirits.

If it be objected that this use of the term is misleading in that it is open to confusion with the other meanings to which reference has been made, the answer is that the difficulty is inevitable in the case of any word which has gathered associations in the course of history. Words are not rigid things condemned from their birth to a single meaning. They may have many connotations, all alike legitimate. Words stand for emotions as well as ideas. They record experiences as well as express beliefs, and one must be careful that in his effort at intellectual clearness he does not obscure those more deep-seated connections of sentiment and interest in which the continuity of life is found.

Such a continuity of experience the word, miracle, recalls. It expresses the fact that in religion man believes himself to be in communication with an unseen Spirit who deals with him directly in ways which admit of recognition. We shall use the term as a convenient phrase to include the sum total of these communications, real or imagined. To repeat our definition: by miracle, for the purpose of the present discussion, we shall understand an exceptional event or quality in an event in nature or in human life, the significance of which religious faith finds in the self-revealing activity of Deity.

Miracle in this sense is as old as religion and as universal. As far back as we can go we find men confronted

with strange phenomena and interpreting them as messages of the gods. Whatever impressed the imagination as extraordinary or unusual, whether in the larger arena of nature or in the narrower sphere of the individual life—the lightning, the earthquake, the pestilence, the meteor, a dream, a sickness, an accident, a recovery—was at least raw material for the miracle-faith. Every religion ancient enough to have a history has its wonder stories, its divine healings, its heavenly visitants. Christianity, bringing its own marvels, enters a field already tenanted. The chief difficulty of the missionary when he tells his converts of God's wonderful dealings with his people in the past is not the scepticism which disbelieves them, but the credulity which takes them as a matter of course.

Scarcely less striking than the antiquity of the belief is its persistence. It has outlived the passing of many philosophies; it has been killed many times, only to come to life again. Like every other practical conviction which has lasted long enough to make itself a place in history, its expression has been affected by the changing intellectual background. The view of the world held by the dogmatic theologians who formulated the traditional apologetic was not the same as that of the unreflective thinkers whose world was still inhabited by the spirits of brook and cloud and tree; and this in turn differs from that of modern pluralists like James or pragmatists like Ritschl. But outlasting all changes of philosophical theory, we find a recurring experience which is characterized by the union of qualities already described—the sense of wonder, and the sense of meaning—and which brings to the man who has it the conviction that in it God is dealing with him in some immediate and significant way. This conviction it is that we wish to trace to its source, in order that we may estimate its value.



## II

Where then shall we look for the roots of so ancient and widespread a belief? This is our first question. What accounts for the origin of the miracle-faith and what explains its persistence?

To our surprise, we find that it has no single or simple answer. Miracle, in the religious sense in which we are studying it, has meant different things at different times and answered different needs for different people. In order to understand the genesis of the belief we have to analyze it into its elements and trace each to its source. Among these elements we find four which recur from age to age and manifest themselves with varying intensity: the sense of wonder, the consciousness of enlightenment, the experience of reinforcement, the longing for certainty.

And first, wonder. We have called miracle a strange fact with a meaning, a luminous surprise. Surprise is indeed the most obvious and the most persistent characteristic of the miracle-belief. We see something startling, arresting, attention-compelling; something that transcends our previous experience, that, think as we will, we cannot reduce to the level of the commonplace and the conventional; something therefore which we have either to dismiss altogether, as wholly unrelated to our present world of interests and activities, or else to approach from some different angle and assign some new and hitherto undreamed-of meaning. Take away the sense of surprise, relate the new experience to what has gone before, as one more example of a well-tried category, bring it, as we say, under law, and the quality which constitutes it miracle would disappear, as the morning star fades and at last is extinguished altogether before the incoming tide of dawn.

Clearly then a primary explanation of man's belief in miracle is to be found in the fact that he is a being capable of surprise, and that the world is full of things that surprise him. Could we exhaust our resources either of new things to be experienced or of new interest to bring to the experience of them, we should outgrow miracle. But so long as these last, its possibility at least is always present.

This explains the persistence of the miracle-belief, in spite of the growth of science. However fast knowledge grows, curiosity grows faster. It finds new material to feed on. Its centre of interest shifts. The things that surprised our ancestors no longer surprise us, or at least not for the same reason, and in the same way; but that is because we have found new things that seem to us more wonderful still. They lived in the immediate present, and each strange experience that came to them was something isolated and independent. When it thundered, a spirit was angry; when it lightened, he was throwing his spear. When they dreamed, they saw the vanished dead face to face and received first-hand messages from realms otherwise inaccessible. But to us contacts appear of which they little dreamed. These isolated occurrences have been shown by science to be parts of a system of occurrences that succeed one another in orderly and predictable fashion. Nature is to us no longer the home of independent and contending spirits. It is a system of forces and relations acting according to principles which we are able in part to catalogue, and believe we shall be able in the future to catalogue more exhaustively still. But for all that, the world is none the less wonderful to us and surprise has not been banished. It has only shifted its hiding-place. The strange thing to us is not so much the event itself as the setting in which it occurs, the consequences which follow from it, and above all the re-

action which it calls forth in the experience of the beholder.

This is what we meant by including in our definition of miracle not merely events but qualities of events. This points to the value-element which is always present in the miracle-belief. It is not simply the fact that something has happened which constitutes a miracle, but something that makes a particular kind of impression, namely, the impression of novelty and uniqueness. And this impression may be present quite as strongly in the case of events which belong to the natural series as of those which we have not yet been able to bring under law—a sunrise, for example, or a birth, or the look in a woman's eyes.

Take, for example, that old puzzle that has baffled scientists so long—the origin of life. Suppose we were able to solve it in the sense in which science understands solution. Suppose we should hit upon the combination of elements for which hitherto we have been searching in vain, whose union would enable us to make the transition from the inorganic to the organic. What should we have accomplished? From the point of view of our practical powers much, but from the point of view of our ultimate understanding nothing at all. How comes it that elements which in isolation remain helpless and inert, receive through contact the mysterious property we call life? What is the origin of the new thing that we experience, of which the scientist's formula is only the shorthand record? Suppose we could be there and see what happened with our own eyes when the contact was made, would it seem any less marvellous, any less inexplicable, any less fitted, in short, to call forth the emotions of wonder and awe which have been the parent of the miracle-faith in every age?

I have taken the simplest illustration. Your own thought can follow into all its ramifications the path

along which it points. When we have explained protoplasm we are only at the beginning of our task. There remain consciousness, species, personality, character, individuality in all its variations, and the endless combinations to which their contact one with another and with physical nature lead. There is history, with its drama of races and of nations; there is art; there is science; there is literature; there is religion—all challenging our interest and awaiting an explanation. Carry our science as far as we please, test and re-test our generalizations in the light of advancing knowledge and enlarging experience, and we need have no fear that we shall exhaust our capital of novelties or render surprise an obsolete attitude. So far as it grows out of our sense of wonder, the roots of the miracle-faith are with us still.

It is evident then that one root of the miracle-belief is the limitation of our knowledge. It is the fact that the things to be experienced so far exceed in number and in range the things that we have experienced in the past; that however much we may have discovered and however much we may have learned, there remains always the boundless sea of the undiscovered and the unexplored, from which new messengers are continually coming to rouse our curiosity and remind us of our ignorance.

But true as this is as far as it goes, it is not a complete statement. If the miracle-faith were no more than a reminder of our limitation, it would be the most depressing of experiences; whereas we know on the contrary that it exalts and inspires. I have spoken of wonder as if it were a confession of weakness. It would be quite as true to call it a prophecy of greatness. Wonder is a window opening upward. It is man's consciousness of kinship to a greater. You cannot surprise a stone—or for that matter (so far as we know) a jelly-fish. But man is always asking why. He is conscious of capacity for appreciating the greatest, and he is never satisfied in

the presence of an unexplained mystery. The unexpected is more than a disturbance. It is a challenge, and miracle is man's way of finding a meaning in what would otherwise be inexplicable.

This second characteristic also appears in our definition. I have called miracle a strange fact with a *meaning*, a *luminous* surprise. It is only when we fix our attention upon this enlightening quality that we appreciate its true significance.

Let us return for a moment in imagination to the pre-scientific conditions of which we were speaking a moment ago. Suppose ourselves wandering with one of our primitive ancestors through the primeval forest into which he had plunged in search of game. I have no doubt he would see and hear many things which seemed to him strange and wonderful, many things which he could not understand, but this would not constitute them miracle in the sense in which we are discussing it here. They would be at most raw material out of which miracle could be made.

But suddenly he stops and looks about him. He has heard some sound or seen some sight which to us is not more significant than the others but which carries to him some secret meaning. It arrests his attention, and, what is more significant, it affects his conduct. He decides that today is not a lucky day for hunting and turns his steps homeward. A miracle has happened, and he will be wise to heed the warning it was meant to give.

What is the difference between these two classes of strange events which constitutes one a miracle while the other is not? It is the introduction of the element of insight. The first is merely a wonder. He looks at it and passes on. The second is not simply a wonder, but a sign; a spirit has spoken and he has heard and understood.

This distinction is of fundamental importance for the whole question of miracle. It marks the dividing line between the scientific and the religious interest. The scientific man is interested in the cause of the event, the religious man in its meaning. When the scientist has shown that you cannot account for what has happened by natural law (or that you can, as the case may be), his interest is at an end. But the interest of the religious man is only beginning. What has this strange event to tell men which is significant for their life? What message does it bring from the gods?

This illustrates a point about the miracle-belief to which we have already had occasion to refer in another connection, namely, the shifting character of the objects with which it is associated. For primitive man the significant things are the things which happen outside of him—the sounds he hears, the sights he sees, the objects he encounters. With ripening experience and maturing judgment attention turns inward, and the earthquake and the fire are succeeded by the still small voice. Where outward events retain their significance as miraculous, it is because they are associated with some outstanding personality or occur in some unique historic setting. But for later as for earlier ages the world remains vocal, and unsuspected meanings disclose themselves to the man who is on the alert to catch the fleeting messages which are flashed to him across the encompassing night.

It is evident then that in order to explain miracle you must add to man's inherent disposition to ask questions his faith in the existence of some one who is able to answer them. The miracle-belief is a striking witness to man's persistent refusal to believe himself alone in the universe. It is one form—not the only one, but one of the oldest and the most familiar—of that teleological interpretation of life which finds the

ultimate cause of things in a rational will in some sense akin to our own.

But there is something to be added before our account is complete. We have spoken of the miracle-belief as having its roots in man's sense of wonder, and in his consciousness of enlightenment; but there is another factor still which needs to be taken into account which it is not so easy to define in a single word. Perhaps reinforcement comes as near as any other term to describing what I have in mind. In miracle man is conscious of some new accession of vitality and power. It is not simply that his questions have been answered, but that his resources have been enlarged. Some hidden spring of energy has been tapped; the marvel of creation has been repeated before his eyes.

It is here only that we reach the heart of the miracle-belief. Miracle is the way in which man confesses his faith in a God who can do things, and is doing them. The questions of religion are never theoretical merely. They spring from a practical interest. Conscious of a hundred needs, outward and inward—the need of healing, of comfort, of forgiveness, of renewal, of enfranchisement—man looks about him for some source of help adequate to his necessity. Is there, or is there not, some power that can meet this need, heal his sickness, assuage his sorrow, blot out his guilt, renew his vitality, lift him above the limitations of his environment, however leaden the weights that drag him down? Is God, or is He not, alive and free, able to meet present needs as well as the needs of the past, to act here and to act today? Miracle answers this question in the affirmative. It is the point at which God touches man directly in the present. It expresses the creative aspect of religion.

Here again we find wide differences in the form this creative energy is believed to take. When life is simple

and need largely physical, miracle is sought and is found without—in the rain that saves the harvest, in the pestilence that destroys the enemy, in healing for the body, or water smitten from the rock; but where the conscience awakes and man, convicted of sin, realizes that his worst foe and his most formidable dangers are within, the centre of interest shifts from the body to the soul. The miracles *par excellence* become regeneration and conversion, and the prayer in which the miracle-faith finds its most fitting expression is that of the Psalmist, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

With the rise of historic religions like Judaism and Christianity the miracle-faith takes on a new significance. It is no longer a matter of individual concern primarily, but of social interest. It expresses God's activity in history, and evidences His presence and control in those crises of the national life when great issues have to be faced and new steps taken of permanent significance for mankind. The miracles of Israel's history are associated with great national figures like Moses and Elijah, and those of Christianity cluster about the person of the founder, his birth, his baptism, his public ministry, his resurrection. So in the great climax which lies ahead, when human history shall reach its consummation and the Kingdom of God be ushered in, God will again intervene in direct activity and miracle will inaugurate the final advent of the Redeemer.

It is this wider social reference which explains the concentration of attention in the older apologetic upon the limited group of miracles recorded in the Bible to the exclusion of those continuing evidences of God's creative and renewing activity which are furnished by our daily experiences. It is not that these are less divine, or that they are less truly miraculous in the sense in which we have been using the term, but that they have a different



function in the divine economy. It is a great mistake to speak as though the Protestant confined God's supernatural activity to the past, while the Catholic admitted a continuing activity in the present. To Calvin and the Westminster divines regeneration was as truly an exercise of creative power as the raising of Christ from the dead. Both alike were inexplicable by natural law. The difference was that the first had significance primarily for the man who experienced it, whereas the second had a unique function in the life of the race. It was God's demonstration in terms that could not be successfully challenged of the messiahship of Jesus, and hence of his divine authority and sufficiency for the religion he came to establish.

This reference to the probative significance of the resurrection suggests the last of the four roots of the miracle-belief, namely, man's desire for certainty. Miracle, in the more developed form, at least, is not simply a wonderful event with a meaning in which God intervenes for man's reinforcement and enlightenment, but an event in which this divine activity is so patently manifest as to admit no possibility of doubt as to its author. As distinct from those flashes of insight which come and go, miracle has permanent evidential value. It brings us face to face with God in so direct and firsthand a fashion that there is no possibility of our being mistaken as to His identity.

This too is the expression of a continuing human interest. Later in its appearance than the other aspects of the miracle-belief to which we have referred, coming to full self-consciousness only after life's disillusioning experiences have banished the simple faith of childhood and installed in its room the spirit that questions, the desire for certainty remains as one of the most deep-seated and enduring of our human aspirations. Face to face with the insecurities of life—its unanswered questions, its haunting doubts—we long for some refuge from

which we cannot be dislodged, some guarantee that the end to which we have consecrated our lives is rooted in the eternal.

There are many forms which the quest for certainty has taken. Some men have sought certainty without, in the authority of infallible church or infallible teacher. Others have hoped to reach their goal by the path of reason, and turned to science for the finality they despaired of finding in church or Bible. And still others have looked inward, and in the intuitions of the soul discovered an inner fortress to which they could retire, confident that they could never be dislodged. In that indescribable experience, carrying within itself its own sanction, in which the artist finds his assurance of beauty, and the patriot his loyalty, and the man of the world his sense of honor, the saint has met his God. "Thou hast formed us for thyself, O God, and our soul is restless till it finds its rest in Thee." In these often quoted words, typical of the mystic's experience in every age, Augustine points us to what is at once the most direct, the most accessible, and the most successful of all the paths to certainty.

Of this mystical intuition of God the miracle-faith in its historic Christian form is one of the most notable examples. It is not only in the closet that man has met God face to face, but on the wider stage of nature and of history. In great institutions like the Catholic Church, reaching back into the remote past and claiming worldwide authority; in great classics, like the Bible, bringing to an age grown careless or inert the consciousness of an undying responsibility and an immortal hope; in great events like those commemorated by Christmas and Easter, marking an epoch in the life of mankind and the source of continuing inspiration for future generations; in great personalities like the founder of the Christian religion, speaking as never man spake, and winging his

words past all the barriers of convention and tradition to the inner citadel of the conscience and the will—in these and such as these God has evidenced His presence in the movement of history, and brought to doubting and unstable spirits the certainty and assurance of which they were in quest.

This mystical element in the miracle-belief is obscured by the traditional definition with its emphasis upon the relation of miracle to natural law. The difficulty with this definition is not that it emphasizes the immediacy of the divine activity in miracle, but that it shifts the grounds of our certainty from intuition to logic and so sets the apologist an impossible task. Nature is not an independent power over against God which acts as a cause among causes. It is only our name for certain observed sequences in the order of phenomena. To prove that an event is a miracle in the sense in which the old apologetic claimed to prove it, it would be necessary not merely to show that it had not been possible to assign it its place in any observed sequence, but that it never would be possible to do so in the future, which manifestly cannot be done. It was inevitable that science should accept the challenge thus given and answer the claim of religion to have demonstrated its miracles with a “not proven.”

But such a method altogether misconceives the real ground of the religious man's belief in miracle. It is not that he can prove of some particular event that it can never be brought under law—a proof which in the nature of the case involves an appeal to the future which precludes present certainty—but that he has had an experience which irresistibly suggests the thought of God. Somewhere in this world of chance and change he has discovered God at work and recognized His handi-craft. Now the assurance comes to him through the impression of power, as in great natural cataclysms

like the earthquake or the tornado; now through the impression of mystery, as in those creative processes which bring us face to face with the wonder-worker we call life; and again in some inner quality, no less inexorable because gentle and gracious in its appeal, such as the love which melts us when we contemplate the cross of Christ, or the joy that thrills us in his invitation to a share in his kingly task of service. But whatever the nature of the appeal, it is always grounded in some antecedent conception of the divine, and as such carries with it its own certainty.

It is clear that if this be a correct account of the genesis of the miracle-belief, there can be no such thing as a final proof of miracle. The experience by which it is justified is a recurring experience. It repeats itself over and over again in the life of the individual, as he faces the old fact in the light of his new environment. It repeats itself over and over again on a larger scale in the life of the race, as the impression of the individual in his solitude is confirmed by the new experiences of those who succeed him.

No one knew this better than the old theologians. They were not so simple as to suppose that you could demonstrate God by logic. Unique as the Bible might be, separate from all other books in the manner of its composition, one could be assured of this fact only because of an immediate witness of the Spirit, bearing witness with his heart here and now that it was the word of God. And Christ might be separated from all his brethren in birth, endowment, and resurrection, and yet his deity could be proved to others only as they experienced for themselves the regenerating and enfranchising influence of his Spirit. In this sense it is true, as has often been said, that it takes a miracle to prove a miracle, and the final proof of the right of the great miracles to hold their central place on the stage

of history is the fact that they have been and continue still to be the parents of an innumerable progeny.

These then are the four roots of the miracle-faith: the sense of wonder, the consciousness of enlightenment, the experience of reinforcement, the longing for certainty; and as long as events occur which arouse this sense, produce this consciousness, induce this experience, and satisfy this longing, we must expect to find men believing in miracles.

### III

We have considered the origin of the miracle-belief, we have analyzed the elements which enter into it. We are ready now to sum up the conclusions to which our study seems to point. What may we gather from our analysis of the psychology of miracle as to the place which it is likely to hold in the religious faith of the future? Is miracle something that we shall outgrow and leave behind, or must we give it a permanent place in our definition of religion?

It is clear that our study points to the latter conclusion. Miracle belongs to religion because it belongs to experience. It is the expression in religion of that creative aspect of things which meets us wherever we touch life, and most clearly of all in personality. The evidence for miracle is the same as that which leads us to believe in personality in any form, whether in ourselves, in others, or in the great unseen Spirit at the heart of things, whose nature we are constrained to believe is in some true sense akin to ours. So long as we believe in persons anywhere or for any reason, we shall continue to believe in miracle, for by a person we mean essentially a miracle-worker. Personality means initiative, enterprise, but at the same time interpretation and fellowship. A person is a being who is able not simply to

bring new things to pass, but at the same time to make the new he does or inspires the bond that links him to some kindred spirit. And the contact that unites these two poles of the life of spirit and fuses them into a single experience is miracle.

So stated, miracle is a part of the larger question of theism, and in the last analysis stands or falls with it. If you could disprove the existence of a personal God, you would disprove miracle. So long as faith in such a God exists miracle will remain, for miracle is the way in which the personal God communicates His will to man.

But if miracle is thus a correlate of our conception of personality, it is evident that our theory of miracle will be affected by whatever modifies our conception of personality. Where we emphasize initiative at the expense of interpretation, we shall magnify the arbitrary element in miracle; where fellowship seems to us most important, we shall lay chief stress on meaning.

This changing emphasis appears clearly in the history of the miracle-belief and explains much that would otherwise be perplexing. It explains, for example, why the miracles of the savage seem to us such isolated and unmeaning phenomena. The reason is that he had not yet realized the social significance of personality. Initiative was his test of greatness; fellowship was as yet an undiscovered art. A Peruvian king is reported to have said of the sun that he could not be a god, because if he were, he would not repeat the same course day after day. The remark is eminently characteristic. To primitive psychology arbitrary power appears inherently excellent, and the stranger and the more unusual a thing is, the more it contradicts convention and defies public opinion, the more divine it seems. Consistency may be a virtue for the subject, but inconsistency is the glory of the sovereign. To do as you please without giving a reason is the supreme prerogative of Deity.

Again, the connection of miracle with personality enables us to see what was the original contribution of Christianity to the miracle-faith. This was not so much the assurance that God was able to work miracles, as a new insight into the character of the miracle-worker. When Jesus refused the Jews' demand for a sign and concentrated attention upon his preaching as the true evidence of his messiahship, he shifted the basis of faith from the unmoral to the moral; and the reason was that he had come to believe in a God who was Father as well as sovereign, and so needed for His full self-expression other language than that of power.

Once more, it is the inconsistency in their conception of personality which explains why the older theologians emphasize the arbitrary aspect of miracle even after they have come to perceive its social significance. They realize as the savage could not the moral values of the soul. They have learned from Jesus to believe in justice and mercy and brotherly love, but they have not yet outgrown the older belief that power pure and simple is the supreme mark of greatness, and the final test of right. "God made you," says Calvin. "Why then criticise him? Shall the creature pass judgment on the Creator?" So they put the two side by side, consistency and inconsistency; justice with its laws on which you can count, and grace which knows no law but the divine good pleasure. On the one side, nature with its uniformity; on the other the supernatural which no man can predict. Both are expressions of personality, both are alike divine; but the supernatural—and this is the characteristic thing—seems somehow more divine than the natural.

It is here that our difficulty with the older treatment of miracle begins. It is not an intellectual but a moral difficulty. It is not that we believe that the occurrence of arbitrary acts is impossible, but that they would not mean to us what they meant to Calvin even if their

occurrence could be proved. To us consistency is the highest virtue for a moral being; and the greater a person is, the more consistent we should expect him to be. We do not overlook the transcendence of God and expect to banish mystery from his dealings with man. On the contrary, the more our knowledge grows, the more we are convinced of our littleness and limitation. But we believe that in the measure that God reveals Himself, the mystery is diminished and we are admitted into an understanding of his purpose.

It is clear then that if we are to retain the conception of miracle, we must extend it more widely than was done in the traditional apologetic. It is not simply a question of proving that at certain rare intervals of time God intervenes in the world for man's salvation, but of recovering again for the consciousness of our time faith in a living God actively at work in our world for the realization of moral ends. The division of territory which underlay the older treatment of the supernatural is no longer possible for us. We recognize the interests which explain it, but we feel that they must find their gratification in a different way. Our world is a universe—at least, our Ideal for the world is a universe—and all that it contains must somehow fall into place as parts of a single consistent system.

Holding this ideal, two possible attitudes are open to us corresponding to two different philosophies of life. According to one of these, there can be no room in the world for miracle because there is nothing in experience which cannot in the last analysis be reduced to the terms of mathematical science. The appearances to the contrary are deceptive appearances. This is true even of those experiences of choice on which man has based his consciousness of freedom. Inexplicable as these seem by their antecedents, they are in reality no exception to the universal law of necessity. To those who take this



view, the ethical interest which leads us to pick and choose, to prefer and reject, to desire and to value, to approve and disapprove, in short, to make our world what we would have it, is not the mark of strength but of weakness. The truly wise man is the contemplative sage whose thought rises above the contingencies in which most men's lives are lived, to those unchanging principles which are equally valid in every possible world.

But for most of us such a solution of life's problems is profoundly unsatisfying. We cannot be content to be mere onlookers at the drama of the universe, nor do we believe we were meant to be. We are conscious of energies that impel us to activity, and of ideals that set the goal to which our effort shall be directed. We measure our past by our future, and it seems to us that we have moved forward in the direction toward which we wish to go. And what we believe of ourselves we believe to be true *a fortiori* of the unseen actor who has fashioned star and sun and sea, whose footsteps we can trace in history, and whose voice we hear speaking in the silence of the soul. He too is working toward an end, as we are; and He too, measuring the present by the past, notes progress in the accomplishment of His plan. As we find in our own experience no inconsistency between law and freedom; as we too, using materials given to us according to principles we cannot change, are yet able to bring new things to pass and glory in our creation, so with God. And the forward steps in His onward march, the stages in that creative evolution which is the law of the divine life, are what religion knows as miracle.

There is room then for a new treatment of the whole question of miracle which shall restore it to its place in the theistic argument in a form which is consistent with the principles which govern the rest of our intellectual life; a treatment which shall emphasize the creative aspect of religion, its venturesomeness and originality, without

losing the steadying influence which has come to us through the discovery of law—above all, a treatment which shall make Jesus' ideal of character its supreme standard of value and put the final test of certainty where he put it: for the individual in the appeal of the Christ-like God to the spirit of man His child, and for society in the new impulse given and contribution made to that forward movement of the race whose aim is common service inspired by common love.